



Al-Risala 1987

September

2-3 September 1987

The Key to Social Harmony

All men are from Adam and Adam was from earth,

-Hadith

Although we are all equal in the eyes of God when it comes to justice, mercy and obedience to the Divine Will, it becomes distressingly clear as we progress through life, that many individuals are less well-equipped than others to succeed in any material or spiritual sense. Philosophers, medical men, sociologists, educationists are still arguing as to the roles of heredity and environment in producing this inequitable state of affairs, and, as yet, are far from producing a solution to the problem. There is no wishing it away, and much as governments and philanthropists have striven to redress this imbalance, we have only to look around us to see with what seeming permanence this situation is stamped. Many countries have attempted to provide equal opportunities for all; but even where material assistance is the greatest, there is always a small group of individuals who stand head and shoulders above the others; there is always, beneath them, a large body of quite average performers, and sometimes an equally large, or even larger group at the foot of the ladder who make very little of their lives, many of them being what modern educationists would call "under-achievers". That is, they do have a certain potential, but they do not make serious efforts to live up to it.

This is a situation which capitalism has always exploited, in the process, exaggerating the differences between the different classes of people. Socialism, on the other hand, has tried to eliminate such differences, in the interests of both the state and the individual. But whatever the political objectives, individual psychology has remained fundamentally the same. There is still the same friction caused by one individual doing better than another, the same resentment at success being the lot of one's neighbour and not of one's own self, the same reluctance to give honour where honour is due. Sometimes this takes the extreme form of character assassination of genuinely superior individuals.

This is when we must stop short of such baseness, This is when we must discount the effects of whatever political and educational systems we live under. This is when we must discard hardened attitudes of envy, bitterness, spite, and, returning to a pure mental state from which all acrimony has been banished, look upon ourselves and our fellow-men as being *equal in the eyes of God*. It is this aspect of human existence upon which we must keep our attention firmly focussed, irrespective of its material trappings. It is then and then only that we shall live in true social harmony.

3 September 1987

Keeping Satan at Bay

There is a Hadith in which the Prophet Mohammad relates a conversation between Satan and one of the prophets of old. This tradition is of some length, but we reproduce here its most salient point:

When Satan asked the Prophet where he would seek refuge from his onslaughts, the latter replied that when he felt the slightest influence of Satan, he would seek refuge in God. God's enemy said, "You have spoken the truth, that is the way to save yourself from me." "Tell me," said the prophet, "how is it that you are able to overpower the son of Adam?" Satan replied, "I seize him when he is angry, or in the grip of carnal desire."

How vulnerable is man to the attacks of Satan when he falls a prey to fits of fury or overwhelming desires. It is then that Satan exploits man's weakness to turn his footsteps away from the path which would lead him straight to Paradise and to set his foot on the downward slope to the raging inferno of Hell. Once on this slippery descent, it is well-nigh impossible for a man to retrace his footsteps.

Man should be ever wary of his own baser instincts, for, if they exist, it is at the instigation of the devil. Every strong craving, every fit of anger is a dangerous pitfall set there in front of man by Satan. The only way to avoid such perils is to turn to the Almighty, and seek His help in all sincerity. Then the devil is sure to be balked of his prey; it is God and God alone who can snatch man from the clutches of Satan.

4 September 1987

Idleness

The Second Caliph, Umer ibn Khattab, often used to express his sense of disillusionment about people he had come to like, when on further acquaintance with them he discovered them to be idle "... On learning that he does not work, he appears to me of no value (he has debased himself in my eyes)".

Which way you look at idleness, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is a great evil, causing one to fritter away one's best talents and leaving one unqualified to face life. A student who is too lazy to study cannot ever hope to acquire knowledge, or have his critical faculties sharpened in any way, and his failure in examinations will leave him without the 'paper' qualifications which is the 'Open Sesame' to good jobs. Without the necessary groundwork, he will find himself leading a vacant existence, simply drifting from pillar to post. Even people who have managed to qualify themselves suitably cannot afford to rest on their laurels. When the period of education is over, it is equally necessary to be consistently hardworking. Many make the excuse between the receipt of a degree and entry into a profession that they are waiting for the right job to come along. But one cannot go on waiting for ever, simply idling away one's time.

Sometimes one inadvertently slips into idle ways because there are no economic pressures in one's life. Those who inherit legacies or have property or investments which bring them some return are an easy prey to idleness. But this is no existence for a human being. Anyone who allows the poison of idleness to creep into his system might as well be dead.

Either one must opt for a regular job which brings one a suitable income and keeps one mentally healthy, so that he never becomes a financial or emotional burden on anyone else, or, if one is financially independent, one should turn one's attention to higher things, pursue noble ends, serve worthy causes and keep oneself fruitfully occupied day in and day out. A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy. No really superior being has ever been found among the ranks of the idle. As the old saying goes, the devil finds work for idle hands.

Hypocrisy

"There are four characteristics, a combination of which brand an individual as a thorough-going hypocrite – These are treachery, mendacity, unreliability in keeping promises and a tendency to quarrel." This saying of the Prophet reported by Abd Allah ibn Amr ibn al-Aas, has been recorded by *Bukhari* and *Muslim*. *Muslim* adds, significantly, that a hypocrite is a hypocrite, "even if he fasts, prays and thinks he is a Muslim." Again, according to Abu Hurayrah the Prophet observes: "There are two characteristics which are never combined in a hypocrite: good character and true understanding of religion."

These words, uttered by the Prophet so many centuries ago are still – regrettably – of relevance today. The moral degeneracy which, in latter days, has set in Muslim nations, takes us right back to the Judaism of ancient times. By religious definition, hypocrisy is mere lip-service, to belief in God and the prophets without faith having penetrated to the innermost recesses of one's heart. It is to claim adherence to divine teachings while, in practice, one's life is devoid of their influence.

The particular aspects of hypocrisy which have been enumerated in the Quran and Hadith are those very traits which have been cited as being characteristic of the Jews, the worst of them being betrayal of trust. "Among them are some who, if you trust them with one dinar will not hand it back unless you demand it with importunity," (Quran 3:75). Amongst the Jews were many who had abandoned the worship of God and had become worshippers of the world. But to conceal their worldliness they had donned the cloak of religion. Their hypocrisy consisted of outer piety masking inner worldliness. In reality, a Jew is not pious; he merely puts up a facade of holiness. In the same way, the hypocrite is not truly religious; the piety which he manifests is little better than an outer shell.

Of the weaknesses which are sooner or later exposed in such people, the foremost is their lack of trustworthiness in worldly Transactions. If, for example, any property is placed under their management, any position commanding respect is designated to them, or anything of material value is entrusted to them, they do not fulfill the expectations to which one would normally feel entitled to from the religious and moral standpoint, when entering into such a transaction. Superficially, such people are pleasant and amicable, but their words are bereft of true sincerity. They put on a semblance of good character, but, in the way they live, there is no real virtue. Embezzlement of funds, failure to keep promises unlawful appropriation of others' property, using one's position for personal ends – all these constitute a breach of trust in one form or the other. Just as this was common among the Jews, so it is to be found in all those so-called Muslims who have been called hypocrites in the *Quran* and *Hadith*. Judaism and hypocrisy are in fact synonyms of pseudo-piety.

Hypocrisy has also been mentioned in the *Quran* as if it were a disease: "There is a sickness in their hearts which God has increased: they shall be sternly punished for their hypocrisy" (Quran 2:10).

What is the root cause of hypocrisy? This ‘sickness’ as the Quran terms it, has been traced by the companions and their followers to ostentation and doubt. This pernicious combination of motivating forces in a man is indeed what produces hypocrisy. When the hypocrite speaks, he chooses his words to mask his true feelings and at the same time make the best possible impression on his hearers. When he acts, he makes sure that his actions never reveal his true attitudes and always present him in the most attractive possible light. If he can bring himself to such baseness, it is because he does not really believe that God has the power to look into his heart. Nor does he accept the fact that whatever one possesses is a gift bestowed by God. His actions are mean and evil. Why? Because he is lacking in any conviction that God will hold him to account for his behaviour on the Day of Judgement. He indulges in fraudulent practices. Why? Because he does not have the fear that God will one day expose his duplicity, or that he risks eternal dishonour. The Prophet wisely observed: “I am afraid of what hypocrites who speak wisely but act cruelly will do to this community” (Bayhiqi).

6 September 1987

Justice for all

Muawiyah, the son of Abu Sufyan, asked Dharar to describe 'Ali. Part of Dhirar's description went like this. "He was like anyone of us. No powerful person could have his way with him in pursuit of falsehood, and no weak soul had cause to despair of being treated justly by him."

7 September 1987

Our Potential is our Wealth

Psychologists have estimated that man puts to use only ten percent of the abilities with which he is born. Professor William James of Harvard University has very aptly observed, "What we ought to be, we are not ready to be." In spite of the inborn qualities nature has endowed us with, the successes which should have been ours in this world keep eluding us for the simple reason that we quite unthinkingly consent to lead inferior lives. Then, discontented, we put the blame on others for not giving us our due. But it is inside ourselves that we should look if we are to find the reasons for life's deficiencies. Constantly viewing others' with envy and a sense of grievance will lead us nowhere, and can turn us into our own worst enemies. The fact should be faced fairly and squarely that it is only if we exploit our own potential to the full that we shall meet with success. Any other course will lead to failure.

It is essential, however, to determine at the outset whether our efforts are directed at worthwhile objectives. Without proper direction our potential will be wasted.

In ancient times and even up to mediaeval times, gold being greatly prized, one of the great preoccupations of the 'scientists' of those days was to convert base metals into gold. Dreams of instant wealth drove innumerable people over the centuries to superhuman efforts. But all this expenditure of time, money and energy was in vain, for death always overtook them before they could achieve anything. It never seemed to occur to any of them that these metals with which they worked had a different and greater potential than anyone could ever have imagined. Iron, for example, was convertible, not into gold, but into machinery, and could be used as a versatile building material of great strength. In the world of today, western nations having learnt these secrets and directed their energies towards building up the relative technology, have succeeded in acquiring far greater wealth than mere silver and gold.

7 September 1987

The best thing one can do Is say something good

A Muslim can do his brother no greater service than to convey to him something good that he has heard
(Jam'I Bayan'ul-'Ilm wa Fadhlahi).

The Life Force

A creeper growing in a courtyard once had the misfortune to have its roots and branches buried under mounds of earth and rubble when the house was undergoing repairs. Later, when the courtyard was cleaned up, the owner of the house cut away the creeper, which had been badly damaged, and even pulled out its roots so that it would not grow again. The whole courtyard had then been laid with bricks and cemented over.

A few weeks later, something stirred at the place where the creeper had been rooted out. The bricks heaved upwards at one point as though something were pushing them from below. This appeared very strange, but was dismissed as being the burrowings of rats or mice. The riddle was solved when some of the bricks were removed, and it was discovered that the creeper had started growing again, although in a sadly distorted form. As it happened, not all of its roots had been pulled out, and when the time of the year came around for them to grow, life began to stir within them and they pushed their way up through the cement to the sunlight. It is one of the nature's miracles that these tender leaves and buds, which can be so easily crushed to a pulp between finger and thumb, can summon up such strength as to force their way through bricks and cement.

The owner of the house then regretted having attempted to take the creeper's life. He remarked, "It is just as if it were appealing to me for the right to grow. Now I certainly won't stand in its way." And so saying, he removed some more of bricks so that it would grow unhindered. In less than a year's time, a fifteen-foot creeper was flourishing against the courtyard wall at the exact point from which it had been so unceremoniously 'uprooted'.

A mountain, despite its great height and girth, cannot remove so much as a pebble from its flanks. But these tiny, tender buds of the tree can crack a cemented floor and sprout up through it. Whence such power? The source of its energy is the mysterious phenomenon of our world called life. Life is an astonishing, ongoing process of this universe-a force which will claim its rights in this world, and, even when uprooted, it continues to exist, albeit dormant, at one place or the other and reappears the moment it finds the opportunity. Just when people have come to the conclusion that, because there is nothing visible on the surface, life must be at an end, that is just when it rears its head from the debris.

9 September 1987

Personality Building

God created wood, but He did not make this wood into boats. He put iron in the earth, but He did not fashion it into machines. Aluminium and plastic were brought into being by Him, but aeroplanes were left unmade. God has put raw materials in the earth, and on the other, he has put a brain in man's head. It is for man to take the materials God has provided and develop them: to make something out of unfabricated matter. In this way the forces of nature are channelled into the building of civilization.

The same thing has to be done in building the human personality. God has created man "in the most noble of images" (Quran, 95:4). Human nature has been made to stand out among all forms of creation. Still, this excellent nature is just a raw material; it is for man to give new form to his original being, to build on the foundations God has laid down. God has presented man with an empty page of history on which man has to write his own destiny. Herein lies man's test in life, and it is upon the outcome of this test that his entire future depends. Man's consciousness has to be turned to realization of Truth, his senses to remembrance of God. The characteristics God has endowed him with have to be moulded into a devout character, his personality developed into a picture of humility and submission to God.

One is given the power of speech at birth: that power must be used either to uphold the truth or to reject it. One is born with superb faculties and one can use them either for worthwhile or for selfish objectives. One can remain as one was – simply the issue of one's mother's womb, or one can take oneself in hand and make oneself into a different, a more worthwhile person.

Everyone has been given a piece of land on which to work. He can either beautify it with flowers or ruin it with thorns – he can make it into a paradise or he can turn it into a raging inferno.

10 September 1987

Road Block

When a road is under repair, a notice bearing the words "Road Closed" is put up to warn unwary travellers. But this does not mean that the path to one's destination is irrevocably barred. There are always other highways and by-ways – it is just a question of looking around for them. Sometimes one can reach one's destination just as well by zig-zagging through narrow lanes and alleyways. The only difference is that this takes somewhat longer, and one has to keep one's wits about one to negotiate narrower roadways and sharper turnings. But arrive one finally does.

Life's journey is very often like this. One would like to proceed by broad straight routes, moving fast and reaching one's goal in the most direct possible way. But, so often such roads are blocked, and achieving success begins to seem a very difficult matter. But for every major route which is blocked, there are always several minor roads which are open. It is just a question of having to go about things in a roundabout way. This is particularly true if you meet with an adversary and feel that you are unable to confront him head-on. It is then that you must find some indirect means of dealing with him. Often compromise or adjustment is the best solution.

When in one particular field there seems to be a discouraging lack of opportunities, one can certainly search for and find opportunities in some other field. When you fail to find a place for yourself in the front row, you can always make do with one in the rear until a place up ahead finally falls vacant for you. When you cannot find people to extend a helping hand to you, go on fearlessly and strike out on your own. When you need things from people to help you on in life and no one seems ready to be generous, stop thinking of how deprived you are and try instead to earn God's blessings.

For every closed door, there is always another which is open – but only to those who have the eyes to see it, and the courage to march through it.

11 September 1987

No Rose Without a Thorn

The rose is so beautiful that it has been called the queen of flowers." "Yet, on the very same branch where the rose blooms so prettily, there is a formidable array of thorns which make it a difficult and sometimes painful business to pluck the rose. But such is the law of nature. There is no rose without its thorns.

The prick which the thorn gives us is a valuable reminder that there are many seemingly attractive propositions in life which have their difficult or unpleasant sides and that if we are to gain whatever is attractive or advantageous in any such situation, we must be prepared to accept and deal with its untoward elements. We cannot separate the rose from its thorns; we have to take the two together.

If we seek advantages, we must also be prepared for setbacks. Success in life means winning through despite severe hindrances and outright failures. There can be no progress without the urge to press onward in the face of all obstacles. Anyone who wishes to achieve anything at all in life has to resign himself to being the loser at some point or points in his career. It is seldom that there can be profit without there being loss at some time or another.

A few days ago, I dropped my spectacles, and the lenses broke. The floor they fell on was made of stone, and so fragile a thing as glass could naturally not withstand the shock of hitting so hard a substance. Had I been standing on an earthen floor, perhaps my glasses would not have broken. As it was, the hard floor underfoot had left me with a pair of useless spectacles dangling in my hands. This was a sharp reminder of how so many of our choices provide us with something we consider of great concrete value and also, sometimes, of great and wonderful beauty, only to leave us with something belonging to a different scale of values hopelessly shattered and of no further use to us. This is so often a feature of everyday life that we must – if we are to go forward – prepare ourselves to face such eventualities, accept them, and then press on regardless of them. We must simply learn to take the rough with the smooth.

Straying from True Religion

"For ye are like unto whited sepulchers."

The traditions of the Prophet and the revelations of God make it clear that there is but one way for a Muslim to attain salvation, and that is to follow the path laid down by the Prophet and his companions. The Prophet left to posterity a *Sunnah*, a pattern of life, which was faithfully adhered to by his Companions, and which provides to this day an example to Muslims – one which, by their Islamic faith, they should have no choice but to follow. Any man-made addition to this *Sunnah*, being in the nature of an innovation, would be abhorrent to the Almighty.

Yet the *Sunnah* is flouted in a number of ways, the most common being the neglect of its fundamental aspects in favour of its more easily followed injunctions. If this happens with great frequency, it, is because people are unable to contemplate the drastic alterations in the established pattern of their lives which would become unavoidable if they were really serious about following the more vital of Islamic tenets. Hence their concern with mere externals instead of getting at the heart of the matter. Hence their evasion of those truths which should eradicate the selfishness of their ways. Another circumvention of the *Sunnah* is the " adoption of its precepts in a partial or imperfect way, so that self-interest is never encroached upon; the fact needs to be faced, fairly and squarely, however, that this is little better than an outright rejection of the principles set forth therein.

The Jewish people, to their great discredit, had fallen into this very error. It was in order to correct this grievous tendency on their part to be self-centredly selective in following religious principle that Jesus the Messiah was sent to them.

His reprimand to them was of the most excoriating nature. "Woe, unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

13 September 1987

What is Life Without Love?

"Lack of love can stunt children's physical growth, retard their intellect or even kill them." This baneful pronouncement has been culled from a recent report by Western medical experts on what they term 'deprivation dwarfism'. Figures which support this view have been gathered from orphanages where such deaths are not unknown. One of the worst tallies was in 1915 in the Baltimore orphanages in Maryland where some 90 percent of the children died in the first year of admission because they had no one to love them.

In the past, children used only to be separated from their parents in serious emergencies such as an outbreak of war, or the premature death of the parents. But this exception is fast becoming the rule in modern, so-called advanced societies where the sanctity of matrimony has been so destroyed that children are frequently born out of wedlock, or are left uncared for by parents who separate on flimsy grounds shortly after marriage. This alienation of children from their parents during the latters' lifetime is little better than being totally orphaned.

Human babies are the weakest and most defenceless of all living creatures, and, as such remain in need of the care and protection of parents for a prolonged period of time. Without this, their fate is pitiable, and just as the human body can become dwarfed, so also can the human spirit. The only cure for this is tender loving care. It is only through love that the human spirit can grow, develop and finally blossom for the greater glory of God.

Word Register

There were a number of Jewish tribes settled in Medina when the Prophet Mohammad emigrated to that city in the thirteenth year of his prophethood. Some of these Jews used to come and sit in the Prophet's gatherings. On such occasions, it sometimes, happens that people do not understand what has been said. An expression is then used to attract the speaker's attention. For this purpose, the Jews chose the Arabic word *ra'ina*. This means, "Have regard for us." A questioner uses this word to indicate that he would like the speaker to define or clarify some point.

Taken literally, some words may seem harmless enough. But in common usage these same words may acquire an unpleasant meaning. This was true of *Ra'ina*, which the Jews used in an insulting way: as used by them, it meant, "Oh, foolish one!"

When the Jews used to do something, other people would naturally jump to the conclusion that this was the way of saints and prophets. Why, if the Jews were doing it, this must be what saints and prophets had done before them. For who if not the Jews were great followers of a long prophetic tradition? That is how the Arabs of Medina had come to think of the Jews. So when they heard the Jews saying, "Ra'ina", they started saying it too. But the Quran forbade the Muslims to do so, enjoining them to say *Unzurna* which means "Look upon us." This has much the same meaning as *Ra'ina*, but unlike it is not open to distortion.

In another verse of the Quran (24:27), the believers have been enjoined to seek permission before entering others' houses, and then to enter with the greeting—"Peace be upon you". At first, the Muslims did not quite know how this commandment was to be carried out. This led to some curious incidents, one of which Abu Daud has related:

A man of the Banu 'Amir came and sought permission to see God's Messenger in his home. "Can I rush in?" he enquired. God's Messenger sent his servant to explain to the visitor how he should ask permission. "Tell him to say, 'Peace be upon you; may I enter?'" And that was what the visitor said, when he heard the Prophet's message. God's Messenger gave him permission and he entered.

The two words in question were *A'Aliju* and *A'Adkhulu*, both meaning the same thing—"Can I rush in?" or "Can I enter?". But far as usage was concerned, *A'Aliju* had acquired base connotations, while *A'Adkhulu* was a simple, straightforward, unambiguous word for asking permission to enter. The word that this visitor had originally used was linguistically correct, but colloquially incorrect. So the Prophet set him right at once.

Whether in writing or in speaking, it is essential that the words used should be appropriate, in the sense that they should correspond to the context in which they are being used. Some words are acceptable in one context, but not in another. It all depends on how they register on the scale of words. It is not the dictionary definition of words which determine where they "register"; it is their usage, their suitability in a certain context and unsuitability in another.

It is symptomatic of Islam's all-pervasive nature that it has given us clear guidelines for every sphere of existence. It has even laid down rules about correct register, bearing in mind the context which one is speaking.

15 September 1987

Framing admonition in general terms

According to "Aisha, when the Prophet used to hear something displeasing about a person, then he would not take that person's name when administering admonishment. Rather he would say: "What's up with people who do or say such things." Thus he would discourage people in a general way from following suit, without directing criticism at anyone in particular.

15 September 1987

Not denying a person his rightful due just because one is on bad terms with him

A person once told 'Umer Ibn Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, that he did not like him very much. "Will you deny me my rights in any way?" he asked. 'Umer said that he would not. "Now only women will revel in love," the man said.

16-17 September 1987

What if People won't Pay Up?

A certain group of young people all belonging to Phulwari Sharif (Patna) once planned to hold a *Seerat* meeting in commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. Theirs being a historic town, they felt that their meeting should be of the same nature, and when asked by the editor of a local journal how much they intended to spend on it, they said they were raising a fund of Rs. 5,000 for this purpose. The editor's response to this was that, of course, they were proud to belong to the Ummah of the Prophet Mohammed, their love for him being the most precious of all their assets. "But tell me," he said, "is this the best way to spread his good example? Just think, there is not one single decent library in the whole of Phulwari Sharif. With this much money, you could lay the foundations of a good library, containing all the best books on *Seerat*, and this could also include a centre for adult education. Whereas the fine sentiments voiced at your meeting will disappear in the wind, the books in the library would continue to benefit people for many years to come." The young people agreed in principle with what the editor had to say, but they were not willing to alter their plans. And their reason? "People will not contribute to such a library, whereas it is easy to raise contributions for a meeting commemorating the Prophet's birth." (*Naqeeb*, Patna, January 16, 1978)

It is a fact that there are things to which people will gladly contribute, and things to which they will not irrespective of the worthiness of the cause. All too frequently, objectives which do not elicit popular support have to be abandoned in favour of less worthy causes which, for no apparent reason, fire the imagination of the public at large.

The Phulwari Sharif incident is indicative of the underlying cause of the present-day decline in Muslim affairs. It being obvious that the general public are undiscriminating in the causes to which they subscribe, those who come forward to work for and amongst Muslims veer sometimes quite unwittingly, towards those areas of operation where contributions are easy to come by. These are the activities which put a person straight into the public spotlight, attracting wide popular support and making a leader's name. There is only one way to change this general attitude, and that is for leaders of the general public to change their attitude, by expending their energies in those activities to which people do not contribute. Undoubtedly, this requires a sacrifice on the part of one generation. But only if they are willing to make this sacrifice will future generations be able to taste the fruits.

17 September 1987

Modern Science Echoes the Quran

It is both disturbing and puzzling that while Muslims themselves have been intent in recent years on publicizing the Islamic cause from political and nationalistic platforms, it has been left to non-Muslims to throw light upon the true relevance of the teachings of Islam. Two scientists of considerable eminence in the field of biology. Dr. Maurice Bucaille, the author of *The Bible, The Quran and Science* and Dr. Keith Moore, Chairman of the Anatomy Department of the University of Toronto, Canada, and author of two important books on embryology, have both expressed their amazement at the scientific accuracy of the Quran's statements about the physical development of human beings. They both feel that it is astonishing that as early as the 7th century, the Quran provided such information as has only become available through scientific research in the last 15 years. Dr. Moore expresses the hope that the relevant Quranic verses "may help to close the gap between science and religion that has existed for so many years." (*The Muslim*, Islamabad, December 24, 1984). According to *The Muslim*, "Dr. Moore's statement was carried by all Canadian newspapers, and was circulated by the national news agency, the Canadian Press. *The Ottawa Citizen* carried it on page one with a banner headline."

The results of Dr. Moore's research having provided undeniable Proof of the Quran being the Book of God – for only God has knowledge of all past and future events – Muslims should concentrate on this aspect of Islam to the exclusion of political and national imperatives, for the latter, far from furthering the true cause of Islam, only serve to erect the barriers of antagonism and suspicion. Muslims should stress the fact that the truth is the common concern of all mankind, and that when it is made known with proper emphasis, the walls of prejudice will crumble and fall.

18 September 1987

An Unfinished Story

Mr. P.N. Pathak, joined the *Hindustan Times* Staff as an ordinary worker, in 1958, and, owing to his devotion and dedication to work, finally succeeded in securing the high post of Deputy Superintendent of its composing department. His early death of heart failure, at the age 50 on December 27, 1984 brought his career to an untimely end.

The note in the newspaper on this sad occasion, said, quite simply, "He rose to the present position by sheer hard work."

(*The Hindustan Times*, December 28, 1984)

After having completed his education in Allahabad, Mr. Pathak worked for some time with the Times of India and Indian Express, then he joined the staff of the Hindustan Times where he found the atmosphere conducive to dedicated work. It involved a long and laborious struggle of 25 years to reach this high post, but before he had time to enjoy the fruits of his labour, death cut his career short.

Man's fate does, indeed, seem tragic and ironic. He works hard in this world to achieve some goal but, hardly has he been able to reap the fruits of his labours, than he is removed from the scene.

How distressing is this end to life! Yet no one stops to give it a thought. Everyone sets himself to repeating the same story as his predecessor. And how many of these stories reach a happy conclusion? There is no human being whose life story ever quite reaches completion. But no one seems to be concerned about discovering the reason. No one appears keen enough to find the path which will lead him to the successful completion of his story.

Every human being in this world is, in fact, a tale left half way. As one seems to near one's destination, one is suddenly taken away. It is as if life were without a destination. Stranger still is the negligence of man towards gravest of realities.

But this is only a temporal way of looking at things. We have these feelings because we think of our final destination as being in this world, and not in the hereafter. It is only when, with the help of God, we change this attitude that we understand that completion, fulfillment and happiness belong to the next life, and not to this.

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Missionary Ethics

Paradoxical as it may seem, the ethics of the missionary bear a striking resemblance to the code of conduct adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by a businessman. Though differently motivated, neither the missionary nor the businessman can afford to offend or discourage those with whom he comes in contact. Just as the profit-seeking businessman makes all kinds of concessions to his customers, putting up with awkwardness and inconvenience in the hopes of doing good business, the divinely inspired missionary goes out to meet his congregation with a lenient, tolerant attitude, ready to ignore taunts and insults, and eager to forgive lapses in decorum or downright obstructive behaviour. Just as the businessman will be extra careful never to do anything which would put a potential consumer off buying his goods, the missionary will take great pains to see that a tension-free ambience is created in which his sermons can have their full effect. Both will avoid evoking negative responses at all costs. This concept of missionary ethics is exactly according to the message of the Prophet Jesus as well as the teachings of Islam. Here we quote a part of a sermon given by Jesus Christ:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if any man will sue thee, at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

And if ye salute your brethren only what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:38-48

Those who fail to plumb the depths of the Prophet Jesus' teaching tend to raise objections to this passivity. To them it appears little better than passive submission, which is surely not practicable in this material world.

I would venture to state that this is a gross misinterpretation of the sermon. Actually, what Jesus has prescribed is a strict moral code for preachers, and not for the general public. In conveying his message to others, the preacher is supposed to bring about an intellectual revolution among the people. To do this, he has to impress it upon the hearts of the people that his message is of paramount importance. This is possible only when the preacher and his congregation have a normal, tension-free environment.

This normal environment can never become a reality if the preacher demands that it be established bilaterally. If a preacher decides that he will only remain calm provided that others do so, and that he will allow himself to slip into being provoked by his audience, a receptive environment can never be created in which proper attention is paid to the message conveyed. This is why it is the responsibility of a preacher to create such a rapport unaided. If he is to pave the way for truly harmonious relationships, he shall have to rise at all times, above retaliatory tactics.

In most cases, conflicts and discord between the preacher and his audience are caused by worldly issues. To obviate this problem, the Prophet Jesus enjoined upon his followers that on any such occasions the preacher must be willing to bear material loss unilaterally so that no unnecessary obstacles be placed in the path of the dissemination of the message. If the congregation wanted to rob the preacher of his shirt, he had to be ready to hand over his cloak as well, so that no attention should be diverted from his message.

The Teaching of Islam

Contrary to what is generally believed, the teachings of Islam do not differ from the teachings of Christ: the code of ethics formulated by Christ for his preachers is identical to that laid down by the Prophet of Islam.

A notable example is that of Suhaib ibn San'an, an inhabitant of Rome who came to live and work in Mecca where, by dint of hard work, he amassed a considerable quantity of gold. Like so many others, after receiving the message of the Prophet, he accepted Islam. In those days, however, there was terrible persecution of the Muslims at the hands of Meccan non-Muslims and, when it became intolerable, the Prophet asked the Muslims to migrate to Medina, to which place he too subsequently emigrated. Suhaib soon followed the Prophet, but, hardly had he set off when the Quraysh lighted upon him and barred his way. They said to him, "You came to us in an abject state of destitution, but then, while you were with us in Mecca, you gradually improved your position until you reached your present state of affluence. Do you really think we will let you run away and take everything with you?" A heated argument ensued, then Suhaib asked, "If I hand over all of my gold to you, will you let me go?" They readily agreed, whereupon Suhaib handed over his entire fortune to them. On arriving at Medina, he told the Prophet of his

encounter with the Quraysh. The Prophet was greatly pleased to hear of how Suhaib had come to join the caravan of Islam after turning over all of his possessions to the enemy. "You have made a good bargain!" he exclaimed.

Many other incidents can be quoted from the lives of the Prophet and his companions which are illuminating on this point. One outstanding example is that of the *Muhajirs* (Emigrants) who left for Medina, leaving behind their homes and their properties in Mecca, returning only after eight long years when Mecca was finally conquered by the Muslims. The real point of the story is that even after the conquest, the Prophet did not allow his companions to retrieve their properties from the usurpers, the reason being that the dwellings and other such places were still occupied. In many cases their Meccan occupants had even sold them off to others. Now the Prophet still had to project Islam to those who were as yet unconverted, and he was fully determined to bring them into his fold. But were the Muslims to claim their rights, this would spark off an unending series of clashes and conflicts and, in the process, missionary activity would be severely hampered. In his wisdom, then, the Prophet prohibited the emigrants from raising any material issues with their non-Muslim compatriots.

The Path of Patience

A part of the Quran on patience reads like this:

"And who speaks better than he who calls others to the service of God, does what is right, and says: 'I am one of the Muslims.' Good and evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good and he between whom and you is enmity, will become your dearest friend. But none will attain this save those who endure with fortitude and are truly fortunate.

And if a malicious attempt is made by the devil to tempt you, seek refuge in God. He hears all and knows all." (41:33-36).

This verse of the Quran shows that for one to become a preacher of Truth, it is necessary to be virtuous. Here 'virtuous' means being true in both word and deed.

Total dedication to his goal helps the preacher to observe this strict code. A true preacher is so serious about his message that it assumes the utmost importance in his eyes. All else is relegated to a secondary place. When such a dedicated man appears on the scene of Dawah he becomes the-embodiment of the same character as IS described in the verse quoted above.

The life of a preacher has to be governed by the strictest moral code of conduct. This implies that even when he is treated badly, his treatment of the wrong-doer should be magnanimous. When he is harmed, he must pray for the person who has harmed him. A preacher is duty-bound to behave correctly in all circumstances. The adoption of such a code calls for great courage, patience and endurance on the part of the preacher. But there is no doubt about it that it is in this unilateral good behaviour that all the secrets of success are hidden.

Man's nature, as God has made it, can be won over by such acts. This is the greatest and most positive weapon that a preacher can have. Whenever a preacher discovers that the urge to revenge and retaliation is gaining the upper hand, he should stop short in what he is doing and allow the full realization to come to him that this is the work of Satan. It is Satan placing temptation in his way, trying to drag him down from the pedestal of virtue. It is Satan trying to rob him of the priceless weapon of good behaviour so that he will lose his audience and his missionary efforts will come to naught. Should Satan succeed, the missionary will be a failure both in this world and in the hereafter.

All the prophets of God have served as His preacher. The Quran says of them that all were well-wishers of the nations to which they addressed themselves. In chapter 79, various prophets are mentioned as having told their respective nations that they were their sincere friends and advisers and had come to "give you honest counsel".

The preacher must figure as the well-wisher of his congregation. This should radiate from his personality, for it is the source of all missionary virtues. Being well-intentioned towards others means being eager to guide and reform, and to seek the benefit of his interlocutors – never his own personal gain. Sincerity urges him on to striving for greater powers of conviction and, even in solitude, he puts his heart and soul into praying for others. When he brings a message to his congregation, no matter how passionate his own feelings may be on the subject, he takes every care to introduce his ideas gently and gradually, wisely and with consideration, so that no one should take offence. He must take into account the character, temperament, education and mood of his audience, and mould what he has to say accordingly. Suddenly confronting people with truths, no matter how noble, can frighten away the faint of heart and the poorly educated, and every concession should be made to whatever human inadequacy is likely to obstruct, distort or halt the preacher in his work. Provocation must be borne with patience, or turned aside with good humour and pleasantry, and on no account should clashes and confrontation vitiate the atmosphere of tranquility so necessary for moral receptiveness. There can be no fruitful response if this atmosphere is dissipated or destroyed.

Avoidance

One important principle which the preacher must observe is avoidance, as it is stated in the Quran at one place that the ignorant should be avoided.

This is something which the preacher must do independently. For it is he who is required to avoid ignorance and not the congregation. This means viewing in a spirit of cool detachment whatever the congregation says and does to thwart him in his missionary activities. The responsibility of maintaining a peaceable environment clearly falls on the preacher. No matter what heckling he has to suffer and no matter how unruly his congregation, he must adhere to the principle of reacting positively and under no circumstances should he ever evince even the merest hint of a negative reaction. He must never allow himself to digress from the true path, even if success is nowhere in sight.

A Shining Example

Maulana Mohd. Ilyas (1886-1944), one of the famous Muslim reformers of modern times, was endowed with this missionary temperament. Here is an event which illustrates this very clearly.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Maulana Ilyas was working in Mewat, in Haryana, an area he used to visit frequently. One day while he was stressing the importance of *Kalma* (article of faith) and *Namaz* (prayer) to a Mewati – the Mewatis were an uncouth, uneducated, ignorant people – the latter took offence and hit the Maulana so hard that he staggered and fell down. Far from becoming angry, he picked himself up as soon as he had recovered from the blow and said to his assailant. "You have done your work. Now let me do mine. Now listen to what I have to say."

Thus without wasting a single moment on recriminations, Maulana Ilyas submitted to this gross injustice, and moments later, he was again trying his best to help the Mewati to understand *Kalma* and *Namaz*. This way of dealing with the situation was so unprecedented, and moreover, so gentle, that the Mewati could not but be moved. He not only listened to him then with patience and attention, but asked his forgiveness and expressed his determination to mend his ways. He ultimately became a permanent helper in the mission. The missionary ethics, in a word, has unilateral good behaviour at its core, and it is only those who have the courage to adopt this code of ethics who can carry out the mission of truth. It is they alone who are worthy of the task.